

'Awesome' showman excels with beef, sheep and swine

BY JOYCE BUYP
Staff Correspondent

WINDSOR — Ease of handling is what enticed John Eaton into showing his first 4-H market lambs. Now, after just three years as a shepherd, the 16-year-old is snagging awards at not only local, but national levels for his sheep-production abilities.

As one of York County's Farm Show youth exhibitors, Eaton has entries lined up in both Suffolk and Dorset breeding categories, market and carcass lambs, and a steer packing plenty of showing potential.

Eaton has been a familiar face around York County beef shows for several years, after entering his first 4-H animal as a nine-year-old rookie. It's been a successful project, earning the Red Lion High School junior several championship ribbons over the past few seasons.

But three years ago he opted to diversify his livestock activities, adding the more maneuverable market lambs to heavyweight steer projects. Dorsets and Suffolks were the breeds of his choice, favored for their own type characteristics as well as useful qualities for crossbreeding.

"The Suffolks have the size and the Dorsets the meatiness," claims Eaton. "Those two characteristics

make a good cross for market lambs."

Market lambs headed for the 1986 Farm Show, though, will be purebred Suffolks, with hopes for possibly a repeat on an earlier Suffolk success story. In November, during the KILE Harrisburg event, his Suffolk market lamb tale finished with a surprise ending.

Taking a placing of 27th out of a class of 32 market lambs at KILE, Eaton left the show, headed for the Kansas City FFA convention, in disappointment over a lamb he had anticipated would make a better showing. In fact, until he had handled the lamb, the KILE judge had initially put Eaton's animal next to last.

While the young man was at the national FFA meet, the lamb went to slaughter for the carcass portion of the judging. Eaton arrived back home to discover that his 27th place lamb had been selected champion on the rail. That award put \$300 cash in his pocket, along with a plaque, temporary guardianship of the revolving trophy, plus a smaller replica for his permanent collection.

It made a suitable finish for a week in which the state FFA livestock judging team, of which he'd been part, had taken a bronze placing at nationals, while Eaton

had won a silver medal for his own efforts.

Foundation animals for his winning Suffolks came from Richard Ebert's Pine Haven Farm at Newville, and from central Pennsylvania breeder Max DeHart. Additional bloodlines recently acquired from a Vermont Suffolk breeder promise high hopes for future shows.

Eaton's Dorset showstring is homebred and owned, with the exception of a ram purchased from breeder John Trostle of Thomasville.

With limited space on their three acres, the Eaton's have built the flock to about 15 ewes, raising some two dozen lambs this past year. While the numbers may be limited, quality comes through at ringside. In 1983, Eaton had one of the county roundup champions, and just this past season, exhibited a reserve champion pair. In addition, he was named this year's champion showman.

"I like working with steers a lot," says this busy young man, who walks his entry a mile every day. "But the sheep are less work once you get to the shows. You can fit them once and then they're pretty much finished."

Eaton will split his Farm Show work time between his nine sheep and "Awesome," his tall, powerful Angus-Chianina steer. The growthy crossbred was acquired through the November 1984 club calf sale held annually by the Donald Walter family, source of most of Eaton's winning project beef animals.

"Look for a calf with the correct structure, stylish and thick, but not carrying a lot of extra skin in the brisket and dewlap areas," advises Eaton on what he critically eyes when selecting project calves. Then, the weanlings go home to a diet of corn, oats and Calf Manna.



York County exhibitor John Eaton believes that his Angus-Chianina steer named Awesome is one of the best he's ever had.



John's breeding sheep get an extra measure of chow in the final days before Farm Show gets underway.

served up with double slabs of mixed hay.

Eaton's success with his calves is impressive. Starting out in 4-H at age nine, in 1979, Eaton claimed the York Fair championship the following year. In 1982 it was a win at the roundup, 1983 followed with his snagging top ribbon's at the 4-H fair, York Fair and the roundup, and a repeat again the next year with a full brother to the steer of the previous season.

The 1982 championship was an especially poignant one for then 13-year-old, and for nearly everyone else at the sale that followed. Eaton had just undergone serious but successful leg surgery in the days immediately before the roundup. When his steer was slapped as champion, his parents, John Sr., and Janet, won the surgeon's approval to bring John, via a wheelchair, into the ring as his champion went across the

auction block as the sale opener.

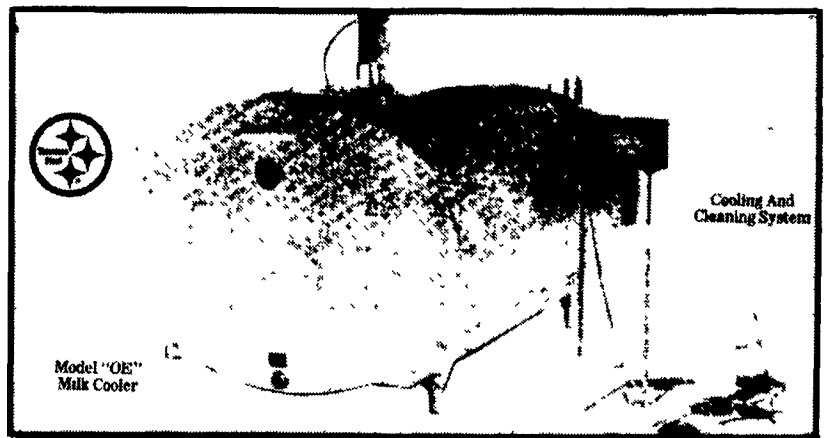
Now John's looking toward another livestock challenge after stumbling successfully into the hog business. When a market hog he purchased for butchering looked impressively stylish, he entered it in the Maryland State Fair at Timonium. The hog caught the judge's eye, won its class and then sold for \$1.75 to Hatfield Packing, earning the youngster a quick \$402 in the sale ring, plus a \$40 class cash prize.

This young man's livestock activities go well beyond accomplishments on the tanbark trail. He is currently president of both the York County 4-H beef club and his Red Lion FFA chapter, as well as vice-president of the county's 4-H sheep club. Eaton also participates in livestock judging in both FFA and 4-H, and carries projects covering the range of livestock in both youth programs.

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